

Lessons Learned Record of Interview

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Candace Rondeaux, Krisanne Campos				
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Krisanne Campos, Research Analyst				
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If just about Afghanistan, it's a sinking ship.

Importance of Context

"How do you deal with contextual specificity?" How different has Afghan experience been? The Afghans are the Afghans. Even if you compare with Pakistan, you're in a different institutional environment and cultural environment.

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[Contextual specificity] needs to be done with a certain degree of modesty. Seen as a best practices to extent that Afghanistan is like the rest. Generalization is difficult. But it would be a crime if we came out of Afghanistan without lessons learned. Need to make sure there's enough here that is going to be applicable to current programs to make it worthwhile.

History of U.S. Engagement in Afghanistan

Remember, when we first got into business in the mid '60s, all about matching the Soviets. We knew what we were doing, had Harvard team...Goal: how can we match what Soviets were doing? The answer at the time was "roads." Faced with same issues as later. Do we want showcase products or high-quality development? Story: went to Afghanistan and asked what we could do for development. Afghans say, "Pave the streets." U.S. says, "No, that's not development." We said, "We'll build streets, not pave them." And we built the grain silo that's still standing. It's very visible. We also built an international airport in Kandahar, even though the Soviets built the airport in Kabul. We figured that international flights would have to stop to refuel in Kandahar before arriving in Kabul. But no one asked the question about whether this made sense - the 707 came out shortly after and didn't need refueling.

We still struggle with this idea. [REDACTED] would argue that you don't want to put your money into grand showcases. But depends on what your goals are.

We didn't quite match Soviets, but everyone knew that we were in town. We came into Afghanistan post-Soviet era with a different mindset from the past.

U.S. Priorities in Afghanistan

Speak with people from team who were there since 2002. Look at first of all with light footprint, we went in with development *not* high on the agenda. Didn't want to stay, nation building was not high on the agenda. But we got there and realized we couldn't walk away. We were focusing on Iraq. We went along very slowly at the beginning (in Afghanistan). Look at the road to Kandahar example. In 2003, we decided this was a high priority.

U.S. Decision Making Process regarding Afghanistan

Can't vie that inside information, but I can say it was very slow getting off the ground. In late 2002-early 2003, the project was creeping along. Bush made a public statement saying they wanted the road done by the end of 2003. We did it in the most rushed fashion after that, meaning it wasn't very good. We *had* to do roads. What I saw in 1997 is from Jalalabad to Kabul, no roads or bridges were built. We had to ford streams. This was easy in terms of priorities: there were no roads, and they needed some.

Aid in the early days: our concern was a real humanitarian crisis in the 1980s. By the 90s, another rush of refugees returned and the humanitarian crisis got even worse. In 2002 (?), From the extent we were involved at first, refugees began flooding back again. The concern was again humanitarian.

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Then we moved onto development. Our thoughts were that we needed to fix irrigation (low-tech: cleaning out and rebuilding). Although agriculture should have been a priority, it was not. Context! Poppy growing – helping irrigation and ag ended up enabling poppy growing.

Extractive Industry

We knew about extractives since the 70s. (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) Too remote, required infrastructure that was not there. Industry – not a lot to build. The Coca-Cola plant failed. Compared with rebuilding Germany, there was an industrial base and *human capital* there. In Afghanistan, people knew how to be shopkeepers, traders, strong entrepreneurial senses, subsistence farming. But no machine tool experience

Returnees to Afghanistan

Returnees: the amount of people who how have an education and who are not being utilized is huge. But not many going to do startups; they didn't have models for it. Pakistan didn't serve as a model.

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

U.S. Legacy in Afghanistan

No one came away saying, "Wow, we did a great job. Proud of what we did." Schools [would have made people happy], but people don't want to talk about that now because they're falling down.

We diverted our resources. We weren't seriously into it – didn't have our heart in it. We were pushed into state-building. The commitment wasn't there. The funds were not there except for humanitarian (not development). Schools were symbolic: "Let's build girls' schools." People were excited: we were doing something new. By 2008, people are saying, "At least we built schools. People are back in school."

When you had seen it in 2001, as a ghost town, no functioning government whatsoever, look at it today and it's thriving in comparison. But I don't think anyone will think of Afghanistan in the near future as having a comparative advantage in high-tech areas. Probably ½ of the work force isn't even in the country.

Look at Vietnam as an example. They needed women to work in labor, not just higher edu/paying jobs, like attorneys. They are needed in textiles, for example. Forty-five percent of people who could work in these industries where Afghanistan could have a comparative advantage are not working. Vietnam *does* this. Afghanistan *does not*.

On the governance side, Provincial councils – women there are much sharper than men because it took a certain kind of woman. Needed more...the kind of women who spoke up. Shows when given this kind of opportunity what can happen.

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Career from 9/11 onwards

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Afghans don't fight until the last man standing; fighters fled to the mountains. Also, there were three girls missing working for a missionary organization. The fear that they were being held by Taliban in Kabul and that if we bombed Kabul, we might kill them, **informed our decision-making** about bombing Kabul. At that time, the Taliban would have never done that – not in their playbook.

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

As you do this project, think, "Where do I place the bar? What are my standards? How do I measure success and failure? What standards do I measure against?" Certainly not the gold standard.

This is what SIGAR may be criticized about: where we set the bar. For example, when we looked at Pakistan (at INS?), we set that bar assuming about 20-25% will be siphoned off.

In Afghanistan, until 2009, this wasn't being talked about until McCrystal stunned the country in his first Commander's Review and said, "We're losing." That shook people up. The turning point came at the end of 2005-beginning of 2006 when we finally woke up to the fact that there was an insurgency that could actually make us fail. The first IEDs and suicide bombers struck, there were the riots. There were fears of

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a Tet Offensive in Kandahar. **BUT, our strategy, militarily, remained the same. Our military strategy didn't really change until 2009.**

Everything was turning the wrong way at the end of 2005. **From 2005-2007 were the worst years in Iraq. Iraq was all we could handle at that point.**

From 2001-2005, we were doing what best we could with what we had. No sense of particular urgency. Wouldn't expect much in terms of additional resources, **just drifting.** Making incremental gains here and there. **Never facing up to the question from the Afghans, "Where's the post-Taliban dividend?" It was their expectation [not a promise on our end], and they were desperate enough to hope.** By 2005, Afghanistan was alive but compared to what I saw in the 90s, it was a different world.

Alarm bells were going off in 2005 that insurgency was much bigger than we ever expected. Expected to get worse, their tactics were changing. But, with that said, not much we could do in regards to getting attention of Washington. A lot of our efforts and energies were absorbed in the elections of 2004-2005.

For staffing: there was a hefty AID compound, but even by that point, they were within the wire. [REDACTED]

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) [REDACTED]

We were out and about, but most government people were locked down.

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Do take seriously where we should set our expectations. Say ultimately there are certain elements of good practice that transcend context. Or even elements they share in common.